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ABSTRACT

The elimination of adult functional illiteracy has been declared a national priority. More than the ability to decipher a given text, functional literacy means the practical application of literacy skills to life in a particular society or group. But this in turn demands that the individual have enough prior knowledge of the surrounding culture and social processes to be able to glean meaning from the text. Functional literacy is both culture-specific and situation-specific, enabling individuals to apply the knowledge gained for purposes of their own choosing; it is also an expansive tool, permitting people to broaden their social and cultural horizons and to participate more fully in the wider context of American life. In order to measure literacy, however, a shared cultural backdrop is needed, and the U.S. high incidence of functional illiteracy probably reflects more the nation's high degree of cultural pluralism than the failure of the schools. In a pluralistic society there are many different contexts and groups, which necessitate different sets of skills and knowledge. Among contexts in which functional illiteracy is a particularly serious problem are immigrant populations, the military, the workplace, and prisons. In such settings, reading levels--being context dependent--cannot be changed independently of the context; however, when the context evolves, demanding more of its members, the chances that literacy levels will improve increase. The most promising approaches to literacy education now focus on the use of adult learning principles building upon the sociocultural characteristics of specific groups of learners. These strategies recognize the need to organize learning experiences in distinct units relating to the immediate concerns, perceptions, and motivations of adults, that is, to be of direct relevance to their contexts. (SK)

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Functional Illiteracy In The United States: Issues, Experiences, and Dilemmas

by

David Harman

Prepared for the
National Adult Literacy Project
a joint project of
Far West Laboratory and The NETWORK, Inc.
November 1984

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The perplexing issue of functional illiteracy, still widespread in contemporary American society, has occasioned numerous efforts to both understand the phenomenon and cope with it. Most recently, President Reagan has launched an Adult Literacy Initiative. As part of that Initiative a National Conference on Adult Literacy was convened in Washington, D.C. during January 1984. Presentations made and discussions conducted during that effort served to articulate many of the questions as yet unanswered and relate experiences that could throw light on them. In the present essay, I have sought to examine some of these questions, experiences and dilemmas against the backdrop of the conference proceedings. In doing so I have tried to weave the Conference deliberations into a somewhat broader analysis of the field, in an effort to identify its attributes, its imponderabilia, and the agenda it must face in furthering the cause it has so assiduously sought to address for so many years.

I. Literacy in Context: Historical and Definitional Parameters

The eradication of illiteracy has been a central concern of educators around the world for quite some time. Every so often this concern erupts into public prominence, usually because it becomes apparent that despite seemingly vigorous efforts undertaken to assure the spread of literacy, illiteracy persists and is, indeed, alarmingly widespread. Such incursions into the realm of educational attainment serve, on the one hand, to cast aspersions on the efficacy of educational practive in general and, on the other hand, (to bemoan highlight and underscore) aspects of the social costs involved.

The continued incidence of illiteracy in a country that boasts a century and a half long tradition of compulsory education is ample cause for alarm. With school participation rates among the highest in the world, with an average educational attainment of well over twelve years of schooling among the population above the age of sixteen, adult illiteracy remains an issue of major proportions in the United States. The severity of the problem was recently underscored by President Reagan in an address marking International Literacy Day (September 7, 1983):

> ...it will take a united effort by all our people to achieve our goal: The elimination of adult functional illiteracy in the United States.

He went on to state that: "Unfortunately, the hidden problem of adult illiteracy holds back many of our citizens, and as a nation we, too, pay a price".

The term "functional illiteracy" used by President Reagan to describe the issue, is one that has been current for the past several decades. It goes beyond the simpler notion of illiteracy by laying emphasis on the uses of literacy and, by implication, on the notion of literacy levels. However, what specifically is meant by the designation "functional" remains rather obscure. Clearly, a precondition of any effort to promote functional literacy should be a clarification of its objectives in precise terms. Such definition has, unfortunately, proven to be most elusive despite numerous attempts to grapple with it. Thus, it seems appropriate to begin this presentation, by examining the parameters and context of the notions of literacy and functional literacy.

Reading is a skill that can assume value only when it is applied to a written text; being able to read without having what to read is rather meaningless. What it is that ought to be read is not determined by educators, but rather by societies and cultures, and different groups make different determinations. Thus, what one society might consider important for its members another culture might not consider important at all. Moreover, within cultures there are often differences such that what is expected from some members of the group is not necessarily expected of

others. Any definition of "functional literacy" is, then, determined by different social groupings of people and is heavily influenced by the culture of those groups. In turn, such groups simultaneously establish a threshold definition of functional literacy and attempt to develop that level among the population - typically focusing instructional efforts on children.

Functional literacy definitions are situation specific, that is, they reflect notions, norms, standards, and aspirations pertaining in different societies and cultures at different times. They are not static; rather they evolve with the groups making their determination. Because of the socio-cultural uniqueness of definitions it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to make meaningful cross-national or international comparisons.

It has often been pointed out that language is naturally oral and has only sythetically been transcribed into symbols which make reading possible. "The biological-historical fact", states Havelock, "is that homo sapiens is a species which uses oral speech, manufactured by the mouth, to communicate...He is not, by definition, a writer or reader. His use of speech...has been acquired by processes of natural selection operating over a million years. The habit of using written symbols to represent such speech is just a useful trick which has existed over too short a span of time to have been build into our genes, whether or not this may happen half a million years hence" (1976, p. 12).

In the ancient Greek city-state, often considered the cradle of literacy, it appears that reading ability was both relatively widespread (Athens) and limited (Sparta), albeit the culture remained essentially an oral one (Cipolla, 1969; Harvey, 1966; Havelock, 1976). As statistics are not available, one cannot determine the extent of literacy with any certitude. Moreover, since reading matter was scarce it is not clear what being literate meant, or what its significance was in everyday life. It does, however, seem that whatever literacy existed was confined to urban centers and activity.

The importance of urban centers for the existence and spread of literacy is underscored by the fact that until the year 1000 the bulk of Europe's population was both rural and illiterate. From that time on urban centers began their gradual development; schools and schooling became more widespread and an urban literacy took root. Cipolla remarks that "Two cultures developed side by side: an urban culture that was essentially literate, and a rural culture essentially illiterate" (1969, p. 55).

Two important benchmarks which greatly influenced education and literacy were the invention of printing and its rapid adoption during the second half of the fifteenth century, and the Protestant Reformation only a few years later. Moveable type made it possible to mass produce reading material at greatly reduced cost. By the end of the fifteenth century, barely fifty years after its invention, it has been estimated that over nine million books had been printed and made available in contrast to

only several tens of thousands of the hand written manuscripts current at the beginning of the century. At almost the same time, the Church Reformers virtually dictated mandatory schooling, espousing the position that it was the duty of parents to make provision for the education of their children. Although compulsory schooling remained several centuries away, there was a rapid and substantial spurt in the establishment of schools, aided no doubt by the easy access to reading matter.

Growing links between urban centers and rural hinterlands further influenced the establishment of schools and spread of literacy beyond the confines of cities. Although urban populations tended to be more literate than rural ones, there is evidence indicating that substantial gains were achieved in the literacy levels of those living in small towns and villages between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries (Cipolla, 1969, Chs. 2-3). To be sure, these developments did not occur uniformly throughout Europe. By the middle of the nineteentn century it has been estimated that the literacy rates in European countries fluctuated between ninety percent in Sweden to ten percent in the Russian Empire, with an overall literacy rate of approximately forty to forty-five percent (ibid., p. 115).

Despite these important and impressive gains, on the eve on the Industrial Revolution more people were illiterate than literate. The Industrial Revolution itself and the dramatic population shifts attending it were important contributors to the further spread of reading and writing skills. Urban populations swelled; new schools were rapidly established, first in response to need and enlightened opinion, later by fiat; reading ability gradually became a prerequisite for much employment. Indeed, during the latter half of the nineteenth century literacy had made greater gains than in the preceeding nine centuries combined.

This dramatic change in the status of literacy is best illustrated through a series of quotes. On the eve of the Industrial Revolution the introduction to an Italian book on agriculture began with the following statement: "I am writing for those who know the letters of the alphabet. Although the peasants are those who till the land, I cannot address myself to them because they do not know how to read nor do they know how to write a word" (Terello, 1772. p. 17). While somewhat exaggerated, this statement serves as an apt description of the general situation prevailing throughout most of rural Europe. Whatever literacy existed was virtually confined to urban centers.

A half century later, well into the Industrial Revolution, engineer-industrialist Alexander Calloway noted that; "I have found from the mode of managing my business, by drawings and written descriptions, a man is not much use unless he can read and write; if a man applies for work and says he cannot read and write, he is asked no more questions" (Thompson, 1965, p.717). The notion of the practical application of literacy skills - their functionality - is forcefully introduced in this statement,

and henceforth was coupled with other arguments favoring their spread. By the end of the last century, as Cipolla points out, "illiteracy was considered a national disgrace all over Europe, and as wealth increased a determined effort was made to devote more resources to the education of the people" (1969, p.88).

The United States, through the turbulent ninteenth century, appears to have enjoyed a higher literacy rate than most of Europe. Its largely immigrant population originated from the more developed European countries and was predominantly urban both in origin and in its new environment. From Colonial days, education for children was deemed to be of central importance and provisions were made to provide some form of it to most people, regardless of social circumstance (Cremin, 1970). That such efforts were neither as comprehensive in their outreach nor as effective as one would have wished is evident from various reports attesting to the continued incidence of illiteracy. (Weiss, 1978; Graff, 1981; Lockridge, 1974; Warren, 1884).

During World War I, and again during the massive recruitment necessitated by World War II, the military establishment discovered a widespread phenomenon of functional illiteracy. Relatively large numbers of recruits were proven, upon being tested, to be incapable of reading at a level considered essential for functioning; estimated at the time to be first a fourth, then a fifth grade standard. During the 1920s the ability to read at a standardized fifth grade level of achievement was deemed to be the minimum requirement for the comprehension of written materials "necessary for the most efficient service" (Hill, 1932, p. 490). This approach served to give numerical definition to the term "functional", implying not a desired reading ability, but rather a minimal one. Anyone not attaining that level was considered functionally illiterate, even if they were technically literate in that they could sign their names or decipher very simple written messages.

Only two decades after the end of World War II, a reassessment of reading level requirements yielded an eight grade equivalency as a benchmark (Hunter and Harman, 1979, pp. 12-16; Weber, 1975, p. 148), and in subsequent years researchers have tended to identify even higher standards (e.g., Sticht, et al, 1972). Each of these increases in the determination of "bottom line" literacy skills reflects several important developments. First it appears that the level at which materials are being written is gradually increasing. Why this is so and whether or not it is necessary are different issues. Second, the increases demand for a relatively high benchmark of functional literacy is indicative of the extend to which reading and writing abilities have become a fundamental component of definitions of basic skills for living; an indication of the rapid evolution of modernity and urbanism, and of their ongoing dynamism.

That functional illiteracy persists, and indeed afflicts an all too large segment of society is a phenomenon that requires a different type of analysis. Depending on the definition of

literacy or functional literacy that one espouses, there may be as few as three million or as many as sixty million illiterate American adults (Harman, 1970, Hunter and Harman, 1979). The low figure is arrived at by counting those beyond the age of sixteen who have not completed five years of primary schooling, on the dual assumption that a fifth grade standard is adequate for basic literacy and that all those who have had five years of schooling actually attain that level of ability. The higher figures assume a much higher base level of reading ability (between eight and twelfth grade), and take cognizance of research findings which have shown that not all of those completing eight or nine years of schooling, or even graduating from high schools can actually read at the grade level ability implied by their years of formal education (e.g., Bormuth, 1975).

Two issues arise from this state of affairs. The first is definitional and simply begs the question of what should constitute an appropriate definition of functional literacy in the United States today. The second issue relates to the acquisition of literacy, seeking answers to questions regarding the learning of reading and writing skills, and why fully schooled youngsters are leaving ten and twelve year school careers without being able to read at functional levels.

The definitional question is a critical one for the understanding of the dilemma of illiteracy. Beclouding the issue is the departure, in recent years, from standard notions of reading constituting an act of encoding and decoding and the new emphasis on comprehension. Essentially, being functionally literate means that an individual can read and understand certain texts. Thus the problem that has most likely emerged is that many people, while being relatively adept at coding, are inadequately equipped to comprehend much of the reading material with which they are confronted. The lacunae exhibited by the functionally illiterate may well be manifest in an inability to read, but are more likely anchored in an insufficient familiarity with the environment, culture and social processes surrounding them, all of which are essential if one is to glean meaning from a text. That which is written, after all exists in a socio-cultural context and relates directly to it. Written messages cannot and do not get composed in a vacuum. Rather, they relate to and derive from the world around them, a world replete with "a particular technology and particular systems of knowledge" (Scribner and Cole, 1981, p. 236). Consequently, functional literacy may be viewed as "not simply knowing how to read and write a particular script but applying this knowledge for specific purposes in specific contexts of use. The nature of those practices, including of course, their technological aspects, will determine the kinds of skills ("consequences") associate with literacy" (ibid.).

It follows that learning literacy entails far more than learning how to read. Being literate means, above all, that an individual is culturally literate. Hirsch states the issue thus (1984, pp. 9-10):

> What chiefly counts in higher reading competence is the amount of relevant prior knowledge that readers have. This is not a mere ideological sentiment on behalf of a shared national culture, but a firm empirical truth about literacy that coincides with more general findings about the importance of specific knowledge in the acquisition of all higher skills....Our illiterate citizens simply do not know the essential background facts and the essential words that represent them. Our schools have not imparted these essential facts and words, because in recent times we have not been willing as a nation to decide what the essential facts and words are. Despite our virtues of diversity and pluralism, our failure to decide upon the core content of adult literacy has created a positive barrier to full citizenship and full acculturation into our society....If we were to act decisively to define cultural literacy, then adult literacy would rise as a matter of course.

This approach provides a plausible explanation of and response to the literacy dilemma. It underscores the notion that reading literacy and cultural literacy are inexorably interwined, and mandates that the two must be imparted in tandem. A definition of functional literacy would state the components of group-appropriate literacy, while emphasizing its situation specific nature:

> Functional literacy: the possession of skills perceived as necessary by particular persons and groups to fulfill thier own self-determined objectives as family and community members, citizens, consumers, job-holders, and members of social, religious, or other associations of their choosing. This includes the ability to obtain information they want and to use that information for their own and others' well-being; the ability to write adequately to satisfy the requirements they set for themselves as being important for their own lives; the ability to deal positively with demands made on them by society; and the ability to

> solve the problems they face in their daily lives. (Hunter and Harman, 1979, pp. 7-8)

Utilizing this definiton, different groups of people would arrive at different specific determinations of literacy, depending on their particular environmental and cultural conditions. The emphasis on self-determination rather than societal definition is significant, pointing out the absolute need for the internalization of social goals by a society's membership and implying the non-viability of external imposition. Stated differently, a definition of literacy cannot assume a cultural backdrop which is not shared by those for whom it is intended. Consequently, different groups of people will employ varieties of definition at different time, all reflective of specific conditions and situations. As cultures and societies evolve so, too, will their definitions of literacy. It would be unrealistic to attempt the development of a level of literacy (including a level of cultural literacy) which is divorced from the overall content of life, and expect its attainment.

In the United States today the map of illiteracy would suggest, above all, that numerous groups within the society are not full participants in that notion of the society which underlies more recent definitions of functional literacy. The instructional challenge, then, is far more complex than merely improving people's reading abilities; it must also emphasize the cultural content from which the current definitions derive. Moreover, one cannot compare U.S. literacy levels with those of other societies because of the difference in the base of definitions.

The social heterogeneity which is one of America's hallmarks has clear manifestations in differential reading ability. It would, indeed, be fallacious to assume that uniformity can be achieved in reading skills while diversity persists in almost every other sphere. The relatively high incidence of functional illiteracy that has been identified should not, therefore, be construed as being a measure of educational failure in the narrow sense of imparting reading and writing skills, but rather as an indication of cultural pluralism and the great difficulties encountered in achieving cultural homogeneity. Schooling alone cannot and should not be viewed as a panacea in this regard. Schools and the curricula they impart are also required to exhibit a cultural sensitivity that will imbue their instructional objectives with a relevance for their pupils which, in turn, would make their mission an accomplishable one. This approach does not mean that some groups of people are destined to live with lower levels of scholastic attainment than others. However, it does suggest that curricula should not assume a common point of departure, and that the inculcation of functional literacy need be, in every way, linked with the learning of the cultural and societal heritage as a whole. Both in schools and in adult literacy programs a common goal or standard of functional

literacy requires the employment of differential curricula and instructional approaches, in each case building upon the socio-cultural characteristics of specific groups of learners.

The phenomenon of illiteracy can only be understood, it has been argued, within the specific context in which it is found. Similarly, definitions of a desired level and substance of literacy need be established within the context to which they relate. Acontextual examinations of the issue are not only misleading but, if used as a basis for planned intervention, can also result in dysfunctional programs and disappointing results.

The continued incidence of functional illiteracy and its relatively vast proportions serve as a significant social commentary and not merely as a statement regarding reading and writing standards. Hence, literacy programs should be construed as efforts to correct social blights, not just as mechanisms for enhancing literacy skills. Reading, in this sense is viewed as an expansive tool, one that makes it possible for individuals to expand their social and cultural horizons and participate more fully in the broader contexts of contemporary American life. Patricia Graham has offered the following eloquent rationale for viewing functional literacy as a central social and educational objective (1981, p. 130):

> Literacy enhances our humanity. If we are literate in late twentieth century America, we expand the ways in which we can learn, understand, and appreciate the world around us. Through literacy we enlarge the range of our vicarious experience, both through our command of written materials and through formulation of new ideas demanded by the rigors of writing and speaking. We are able to enlarge our competence if we are literate because we have additional tools to use in exploring the world. To learn, to express, to decide and to do...together permit us to become more autonomous individuals, less circumscribed by the conditions of social class, sex, and ethnicity into which we are born.

Included in this statement on literacy is a social ideology which, while accepting the diversity and heterogeneity, would seek to lower the boundries between groups, enabling greater mobility and expression of individual desires and potential. Transcending technical reading and writing, literacy is thought of as a tool for the attainment of those quintessential American social nostrums of egalitarianism, social justice, full participation and mobility. The spread of functional literacy serves, in effect, as an important mechanism for the spread of these precepts.

Because of definitional difficulties one cannot establish with a high degree of certitude the full extent of functional illiteracy in the United States today. Depending on the definition employed there may be as many as sixty million people above the age of sixteen in this category, fully a third of the adult population (Harman, 1984). This figure assumes a definition in which an approximate twelfth grade standard is considered desirable, and takes into account those who have not completed twelve years of schooling, as well as those who, despite having graduated from high schools, have been found to be deficient in their reading abilities.

Clearly, it is the possible enormity of the issue that has led to the current "Adult Literacy Initiative" announced by President Reagan. It should be equally as clear that this initiative is not only motivated by the apparent inability of so many people to read at what, after all, are fairly high standards. Coupled with the more straightforward attitudes towards reading, the initiative gives expression to a fundamental American social vision, indicating that while great strides have been made towards its actualization, much remains to be done. Society continues to be riven by divisions which isolate large segments of the population from the opportunity to partake fully in the "American Dream". While cultural pluralism is appreciated, it should not serve as a barrier to such participation. Moreover, the Initiative underscores the growing gaps between growth and development in macro terms and the less rapid evolution at the individual - micro - level. Underlying these assertions is a dual notion of social cost: a societal social cost resulting from less than full enagement of the population in its macro-development processes; and a personal, individual cost resulting from the inability to take full advantage of that which society has to offer.

Literacy education is viewed as an important means to correct this situation, but it can only do so if it is approached in terms far broader than the teaching or improvement of reading and writing skills. Participants in a recent National Adult Literacy Conference, sponsored in conjunction with the Presidentail Initiative, while focusing heavily on reading, all emphasized this broader concept, arguing that its attainment and that of improved reading go together hand in hand (1984).

II. The Context of Literacy: Reading in a Complex, Modern Society

Adoption of a high level of reading ability, at or around a twelfth grade equivalency, as a necessary or desirable standard rests upon certain assumptions and supportive data. The central assumption underlying determinations of level relates to the functionality of reading skills, that is to the reading levels that are generally required in order to gain employment and perform well in jobs. Obtaining information in general, the ability to read about, analyze and participate in current events are also, at times, cited as motivating factors in setting standards. Thus, a report of the National Academy of Education Reading Committee (Carrol and Chall, 1975) suggested a twelfth grade level which "implies an ability to read the New York Times or a magazine such as Time, critically and analytically" (Chall, 1984, p. 18). There is, then a decidedly instrumental approach to reading which is based on the premise that reading ablity constitutes an essential skill without which individuals cannot function well in modern society (i.e., be actively and productively employed), and cannot properly be active in its democratic processes (i.e., citizen particpation). It is interesting to note that reading for leisure and self-fulfillment is not, in and of itself, an objective of this approach. Literacy level definitions tend to focus on the relations of individuals to society, its needs and requirements, not on self-actualization. To be sure, a person able to read at a twelfth grade level is assumed to have the tools for that purpose as well and can apply them if he or she wish to do so.

A number of studies in recent years have sought to assess the reading levels necessary to cope with specific, job related reading tasks. Sticht and his colleagues, for example, found that materials associated with relatively low level military occupations tended to be written at between a tenth and twelfth grade level (1973). A similar finding has been reported by Mikulecky (1981), while a study conducted by the University of Texas, utilizing relatively simple tasks such as addressing an envelope, instructions regarding checking policy in supermarkets, employment advertisements, telephone directory, and job application forms, also found that at least an eighth, and preferably a tenth grade level ability are called for (1975). All these investigations discern a trend towards increased complexity of writing, in turn requiring increasingly high levels of reading ability. It should, however, be borne in mind that the research literature on reading level requirements remains very scarce such that determinations are being made on the basis of a rather limited data base. Mary Tenopyr correctly remarks that: "Much of the information we have now about adult literacy requirements in the workplace is anecdotal. This is not to say that the information is inaccurate or that careful study would yield grossly different results. However, a carefully developed database could be an asset in pinpointing problems more exactly, providng for evaluating educational programs, and monitoring changes in literacy requirements in these rapidly changing times" (1984, p. 7).

Two important questions arise from the adoption of a twelfth grade equivalency as a standard of functional literacy. The first relates to the written materials themselves. Is it absolutely essential that materials be written at such a relatively high level of readability, or could the contents be equally as well presented by making use of a less complex vocabulary? Posed differently, this question might be stated thus: is it possible to narrow the gap between people's reading ability and the materials they are required to read by decreasing the level at which such materials are written? The second issue relates to the functionally illiterate. It has been estimated that as many as sixty million Americans above the age of sixteen cannot read at a twelfth grade level. Does the mismatch between their reading ability and actual job related materials mean that they are unemployable or incapable of adequate job functioning? While logic - if not research - would indicate that the answer to the first question is affirmative, that is that it should be possible to request or train writers to reduce the complexity levels of the materials they write, the answer to the second issue is a far more complicated one.

Employment statistics reveal that the overwhelming majority of those considered functionally illiterate are gainfully engaged in the labor market. It could, and has been argued that the functionally illiterate tend to be employed in lower level, and hence lower paying jobs: "Those who have completed high school have incomes about double those who have not completed grade school, and half again higher than those with eighth grade education. This situation prevails among all sectors of the population: men and women, white and black, and all age groups" (Hunter and Harman, 1979, p. 37). It is certainly also the case that the liklihood of being unemployed increases dramatically in relation to formal educational attainment. Does it, however, follow that improving reading skills and general educational backgrounds of that population mass would necessarily result in its members climbing the job ladder to more sophisticated, better paying positions? Although for some individuals improved education could lead to greater occupational mobility, for the majority of those involved the prospects of such movement are dim. After all, the positions they occupy in the labor force would continue to demand workers such that someone would have to fill them. In most cases both the nature of the work and the renumeration simply do not lend themselves to upward adjustment. On other, higher rungs of the ladder there are limits to the demand for new, additional employees which would severly limit the scope of any attempt at mass upward mobility. One is forced, then, to conclude that character and shape of the labor market cannot be appreciably influenced by the single factor of a better educated, more literate work force.

It it is the case, as some researchers point out (e.g., Sticht), that reading matter required for even fairly low level occupations is often written at standards exceeding the reading

abilities of their occupants, then it would appear that reading is not always that necessary for job performance. Alternatively, it might be argued that improved literacy skills might result in improved performance, and hence greater productivity. Unfortunately, the paucity of research on this issue mitigates against the drawing of any definite conclusions, leaving these questions, assertions, and assumptions at the level of speculation. In the absence of more precise information such speculation will continue to temper attitudes towards literacy and job related definition.

Earlier, it was suggested that literacy and functional literacy are conceptually far broader than just reading; that they encompass a "package" of skills, knowledge, and attitudes that together define a culture. Employers, it would seem, tend to prefer this more global approach to that of confining notions of literacy to reading. The term "basic skills" which includes a rainbow of components (reading, writing, mathematics, computer literacy, technical skills, general and specific knowledge) more aptly defines their concerns with educationally derived job related qualifications. While functional illiteracy is, of course, an area of concern, there is a distinct tendency to veiw it in relation to other deficiencies, such that literacy becomes one, not easily differentiated element of qualificatory and performance related desirada (Duffy, 1984; McCord, 1984; Tenopyr, 1984; Center for Public Resources, 1983).

Citizen participation as a basis for defining functional literacy in a contemporary context is far more perplexing, not the least due to the subjectivity inherent in its elaboration. In contrast, the job related determination represents a "safe" domain. One must ask what, indeed, constitutes citizen participation and what type of skills are required. If for example, casting a ballot in national elections is to be viewed as the quintessential participatory act, one might well pose the question as to how much reading of what nature is really all that necessary. Modern election campaigns have evolved into battles waged on television screens and to a far lesser extent in print. Surely, an individual wishing to select a candidate on the basis of his or her positions on certain public issues can glean as much, if not more information by watching television than by following the press. Moreover, voting patterns in recent national elections indicate that a great many people who can read at functional levels choose not to vote. If, then, increasing the proportions and numbers of those voting is an issue of public policy, improving reading skills would appear to have marginal, if any, influence. How essential is newspaper readership to citizen participation? While some, clearly, advocate its desireabilty their position must remain purely subjective, in turn subject to debate. There are, indeed, those who argue that literacy skills, never universal in their spread, are rapidly becoming anachronistic as other media, born of the twentieth century technological revolution, make it possible for people to receive information as well as a wide range of recreational services

without having to read at all (Disch, 1973). Thus, the determination of what level of literacy, or whether literacy at all is necessary for what might be considered citizenship in modern state remains open to debate.

Mass literacy - so new a concept in historical terms - still appears to be searching for its appropriate social, contextual definiton. Clearly, literacy implies far more than just a technical ability. In many ways it defines an individuals' relationship to the society in which he or she lives. As such, the determination of requisite or desired literacy levels emanates from certain visions of society and cannot be divorced from them. All societies have such visions, and in all societies they are modified over time in response to changed circumstances. In the United States today current notions mandate high literacy standards, posing them as nationwide objectives. These notions, in and of themselves, create expectations of individuals which, if not met tend to penalize those who have not attained them. Within this context the presently accepted definition of literacy is derived, serving as the basis for all efforts aimed at its achievement. Literacy in this regard assumes omnibus proportions: it is simulataneously a statement about reading abilities required or desired of individuals and a far broader articulation of the cultural and social content that individuals must master. To some extent the term "literacy" is an unfortunate one, obfuscating the heavy emphasis on content by implying that the problem might merely be one of skill attainment. Citizens of the United States should be able to read at the stipulated levels, but beyond and above that they should be in possession of both general and specific knowledge emanating from and relating to the contexts in which they function; a familiarity essential both for full participation in those contexts and for enabling people to act in and on those environments in order to mold their future.

III. Literacy in Various Contexts and Groups

Within any society, and particularly one as large and diverse as the United States, one finds a plethora of different groups and contexts. While sharing many characteristics and needs as a result of common membership in the same country, there are also group and context specific attributes and requirements which cohere to make each a unique entity. Different contexts impose differing sets of demands upon those relating to them; different groups of people find it necessary to develop and obtain certain sets of skills and knowledge in order to facilitate their relationship and ability to function both within the specific group and in the larger society. During the course of the National Adult Literacy Conference (1984) a small sampling of such groups and contexts were presented through a series of papers which form the bulk of the background for this section (Duffy, Mangum, McCord, Tenopyr, Roueche, Gold, Longfield, Savage, Wallerstein).

Groups are defined, for current purposes, as communities of people sharing a critical characteristic of background or origin. Recent immigrants from Vietnam, Mexico, the Soviet Union, or any other part of the world each share cultures and languages of origin; together they form a larger group for whom English is a second if not a third language, and the culture of America is a new and foreign one to which they must adapt. Ethnic minorities, different racial groups, the urban poor, and rural farmers all constitute other examples of unique social groups. Differentiation based on geography might be yet another way to define specific groups; for example, there would be important differences between a population residing in a northern urban center and one living in Southern suburbia.

Contexts are defined here as specific situations in which people - regardless of group of origin or membership - function during one or another part of their lives and which have a contextual culture and contextually determined requirements for both participation and functioning. The military, prisons, the workplace, and schools are all examples of such contexts.

Throughout her history the United States has played host to numerous groups of immigrants hailing from virtually all corners of the earth. Often such groups arrive in waves as refugees, coming from an area of distress in order to seek and establish new lives. Knowledge of English is, of course, essential if one is to effectively integrate into American society, thus creating an immediate need of migrants to learn it and of the host country to provide language instruction. The teaching of English as a second language (ESL) has, indeed, been one of the oldest traditions of American adult education and adult literacy programs. The population requiring such instruction is by no means homogeneous. Its members come from diverse lands and cultures, within them representing various socio-economic groups. Some may be literate in their own tongues, others illiterate in any language. Some, anxious about the rigors of assimilation congregate

in clusters where they attempt to maintain their languages and cultures of origin to the greatest possible extent, others seek rapid absorption into what they perceive to be mainstream fabric.

Language and literacy in English tend to be the most apparent gap in a migrant's basket of competencies, consequently attracting the greatest amount of attention. They are, however, only the tip of an iceberg, the most immediately discernible manifestation of a much broader cultural disorientation. Learning the new language becomes, in consequence, an act of acculturation, entailing far more than just the relatively straightforward acquisition of English. Some of the earlier programs intended to teach English to new arrivals were colloquially known as "Americanization" courses, a correct perception of their full import. Ostensibly seeking to impart English language and literacy proficiency, ESL programs, more significantly perhaps, serve as a window, an introduction into the new culture.

The major migratory waves to the United States in recent years largely have their origins in South-East Asian and Central American countries, with smaller groups arriving from countries as disparate as the Soviet Union, Iran, Afganistan, and Great Britain. While there is an understandable temptation to cluster Asians or Latin Americans for instructional purposes, it should continuously be borne in mind that Vietnamese, Laotians, and Cambodians are separated from each other in language, culture, and experience, as are immigrants from other areas of different regions. Within each country group there are also many noteworthy distinctions to be made. From a linguistic point of view, seven groupings can be identified, each with its obvious ramifications for ESL activity. The first category consists of people who are preliterate, speaking languages "for which there is no written form or whose written form is rare (e.g., Hmong, Mien)." The second is that of the illiterate - "Those who speak a language for which there is a written form which is common but who do not read or write themselves". A third group consists of the semi-literate, able to read and write their own languages at very elementary, presumably non-functional levels. The fourth group includes people literate in a language that is not based on a Roman alphabet (e.g., Arabic, Cambodian, Farsi, Hebrew, Japanese, Thai, etc.) (Savage, 1984 suggests this four tiered taxonomy.) People who through prior schooling or contacts have attained a modicum of English language and literacy skills, albeit at an inadequate, non-functional standard fall into the fifth group. The sixth group includes those literate in language that are based on the Roman alphabet but have no knowledge of English, while the seventh consists of people versed and literate in an English which is non-idiomatic, non-American. Superimposed on each of these categories, of course, are varieties of cultural background and experience, closer to or more distant from the new dominant culture. Each of these groups, then, simultaneously present educators with a different challenge in both literacy instruction and acculturation patterns.

Among the factors that merit concerted attention in regard to immigrant populations is the extent to which they possess skills and knowledge - other than language - which either enhance or impede their employability. Language and literacy alone cannot assure absorption, particularly in a context so occupation oriented as to derive its definitions of functional literacy almost exclusively from the labor market realm. Underscoring this issue is the fact that over half of all refugees are dependent upon welfare payments, a figure which doubtless excludes many illegal immigrants not desirous of disclosing their existence to the authorities (figure correct for September 1982, reported in Longfield, 1984, p. 4). In the absence of appropriate skills, language and literacy functionality may well be orchestrated with job directed training with the two being viewed as necessarily complementary activities. Ultimately, linguistic abilities more than likely improve with usage, in turn requiring that individuals be enabled to extend their range of associations outside the immediate group of others from the same area of origin. School attendance for children and labor market participiation for adults appear to be the most promising avenues in this regard as, insofrar as language acquisition and acculturation are concerned, they act in a mutually supportive fashion.

Failure in absorption and acculturation have been observed to have deleterious effects. "The perception of ethnicity among immigrant groups has resulted in their almost total linguistic and cultural isolation from members of the dominant society. The isolation may provide a degree of social and psychological security but the price is high. Lack of interaction skills result in job and social frustrations" (Naimi, 1974). As most immigrants will remain in the United States, regardless of their absorption experiences, unsuccessful assimilation can only result in the formation of pockets of malcontent, alien to mainstream American life. Children growing up in such environments would probably be negatively affected, sowing the seeds for yet another generation of unhappiness and marginality.

Evidence that this is not merely an unnecessarily Jobian extrapolation can be garnered from the unfortunate fact that America's least advantaged groups have been in residence for generations. On all indices of disadvantage - proverty, illiteracy, unemployment, low income, educational attainment and substandard housing - members of some racial and ethnic minority groups are disproportionately over-represented (Hunter and Harman, 1979, pp. 43-53). Among them Native Americans have been here forever and Blacks since the sixteenth century; both dominating the roster of disadvantaged groups. Various Hispanic groups, more recently arrived, have also established significant patterns of cross-generational deprivation (Wallerstein, 1984). In the case of these groups an important factor is added to the problems which plague recent immigrants: the historical inability to break the bonds of deprivation, the existence of a rut of disadvantage from which successive generations have found extrication to be extremely difficult, if not impossible. For these groups literacy improvements can be most important, but alone

cannot be viewed as a panacea for social inequity and marginality. Rather they must be viewed in tandem with other necessary interventions dealing not only with other aspects of these groups' condition, but also with wider public perceptions of the groups, of their stereotypification, and of fundamental concepts of social justice and egalitarianism.

While the groups thus far discussed proportionately dominate the map of functional illiteracy, yet another agglomeration of people have been found in recent years to occupy a significant position in it - school leavers and high school graduates of all hues. High school completion, it increasingly appears, does not guarantee functional literacy. Indeed, it has been found that many are unable to read at eighth grade levels, far below the defined standard. As many as thirty states, perplexed by this revelation, have passed legislation requiring evidence of at least an eighth grade reading ability as a prerequisite for graduation (Harman, 1984). Among those who have not completed their high school education - between fifty-four and sixty million people - literacy skills can certainly not be assumed to be any more developed. The numbers of people indicated by these figures imply clearly that they are to be found in virtually every social grouping, making the task of more specific identification a highly complex one. It should, however, be noted that geographic factors loom large as correlates. "The Southern states have, by far, the highest proportions of non-high school graduating adults. In nine such states this situation is true of over half the adult population; in the entire region forty-two percent had not even completed the eighth grade. By contrast, twenty-one percent of school leavers in the North Central states, twenty-seven percent of those in the Northeast, and twenty-eight percent of those not graduating high school in the Western states, had not completed eight grades" (Harman, 1984). Regional attributes would appear from these figures to intersect with group characteristics and possibly suggest that the de facto existence of differential functional literacy definitions is more potent than that determined nationally.

Such a suggestion provides an apt point of transition from a discussion of group to context in relation to functional literacy. The significant regional distinctions strongly imply the existence of contextual diversity, perhaps more so than group differences. Contextually determined requirements would tend to establish actual conditions which, in fact, are more or less met by those functioning within them, in a manner approximating a free market. To be sure, that definitions of functional literacy derive from context rather than the other way around has already been argued. Equally, it has been posited that different contexts would breed different determinations, so that the notion of a diversity of definition in which, beyond a common shared base, situation specific criteria rather than globally identified determinants are applied seems to be both viable and logical. With the exception of specific requirements in military contexts (Duffy, 1984), there has been little, if any, systematic effort to establish parameters of desired functional literacy levels.

One cannot find anywhere in the literature, for example, efforts to identify regionalized standards. Underlying this lacuna, it might be speculated, is the deep American ideological commitment to concepts of mobility and equal opportunity, mitigating against definitional undertakings that could be viewed as inhibiting, or in any way constraining their attainment.

In two contextual situations - the military and some parts of industry - reality, need, and the good of the enterprise have combined to both define necessary levels and establish corrective measures. Indeed, the military can claim primacy in functional literacy standard setting when, during both World Wars, they came to grips with illiteracy and decried a fourth and then a fifth grade equivalency as being essential for proper functioning. Continuing in this tradition, research commissioned in later years identified an eighth and later between a tenth and twelfth grade norm as basic requirements (Sticht, et al, 1972; Sticht, et al, 1973; Duffy, 1984). All of these definitions resulted from careful analyses of reading tasks that members of the military serving in a variety of specialized, usually low level occupations, were actually required to perform in the execution of their duties. The military context is by no means either uniform or homogeneous. It requires large numbers of people distributed among a vast array of occupations in different parts of the world, thus requiring that an equally vast panoply of competencies be represented. Written material is heavily utilized throughout the system as a central communication and work tool such that, regardless of one's specific role, reading is a necessary component. In this regard it is easy to understand the emphasis placed upon reading skills within the military establishment and the zeal with which their adequate spread is pursued. In recent years the concern with reading has become heightened as new volunteer recruitment mechanisms have tended to attract a less, rather than a well educated person into service, while at the same time the levels of complexity in nearly all military occupations are increasing.

Unlike the military, industry has yet to come to grips with literacy in its context. Broad generalizations regarding the need for a functionally literate work force substitute for more accurate definition. Like the military, industry is heterogeneous, consisting of diverse jobs and job definitions both within and across industries. There are, however, no efforts to identify basic minima for reading based on those materials actually required for job performance. Instead, reading tends to be clustered with other "basic" skills such as mathematics, writing, speaking and listening, reasoning and problem solving, and science (Center for Public Resources, 1983; McCord, 1984) in an undifferentiated fashion. Indeed, when asked to identify priorities among these basic skills, employees tended to place emphasis on competencies other than literacy, in particular on verbal communication abilities (ibid.). When queried about employee deficiencies, "companies responding to the CPR survey indicated that reading skills of out-of-school employees met or exceeded specific job needs. Only in secretarial/clerical and

technical positions did forty percent or more of the responding companies find deficiencies" (CPR, 1983, p. 18). While this latter finding is ample cause for concern, it nonetheless would appear that the vast majority of industrial employers are viewed by their employers as having adequate basic skills, including reading competencies, and thus, do not require remedial instruction in those areas. This attitude is borne out by Tenopyr who suggests, however, that the issue may well be real but hidden. First, she argues, accurate determinations cannot be made in the absence of thorough job analyses similar to those extant in the military; as a result, attitudes are formulated on the basis of incomplete, often "apocryphal" information. Second, she indicates that employers have alternative compensatory mechanisms available to them in coping with employee deficiencies such as the restructuring of job definition, the shifting of people to other tasks, and changing the composition of their work force; all of which may be applied in order to rapidly rectify situations before and in lieu of education (1984).

Industry is not one, but a multitude of contexts. Each, presumably, has its own specific requirements deriving from a combination of factors particular to it, such that no single definition can be applied throughout. In general, research tends to be lacking regarding specific competency requirements for jobs with different groups operating under different sets of assumptions. Moreover, there seems to be little communication within and across industries on the issues of basic skills and functional literacy. The issue, in the main, is one raised by those concerned with literacy and is not overly emphasized by employers, indicating that in their perception it does not warrant high consideration. Many industries across the country have established education and training programs for their employees, indeed in impressive quantity and scope (Training, 1983). Only cursory mention is made of the need for inclusion of literacy programs among such efforts, again leading to, at the very least, a tentative conclusion that industry in general is less emphatic about basic skills than either the military or education sectors.

It is much easier to understand education's concern with literacy. While the continued existence of illiteracy is a reflection upon the efficacy with which education equits its responsibilities and causes a great deal of consternation for that reason alone, it is also true that education is an industry itself and one of the largest employers of its own graduates. Within education central emphasis is placed upon literacy as being essential for job performance. Precisely how relevant this emphasis is for industry remains, for the time being, an unanswered question. McCord, for example, has stated in regard to one high employment sector that: "A great deal needs to be known about the relationship between what the retailing industry is experiencing in recruiting, retention and performance of a work force and the development of basic skills. A meaningful contribution would be made by conducting research in these areas of major concern to the industry" (1984, p. 15). Until such a time when research findings will make it possible to determine the

extent of literacy made necessary by varieties of industrial job requirements, the basic assumption that such skills at a fairly advanced level are important will most likely prevail. Whether or not this assumption will prove sufficient to support appropriate instructional efforts, however, remains to be seen.

Another type of context derives its definition from criteria other than type and place of employment and work, but rather from participation in particular social structures. One such structure that has already been discussed is that of a country, the underlying assumption in its regard being that "proper" functioning as a citizen in any given country requires literacy skills, likened to and derived from the social, cultural, and economic factors pertaining in that country. It has also been suggested that in any national situation, and particularly in larger, more heterogeneous ones, more than one standard may evolve. Such contexts are permanent in that individuals usually lead their lives as citizens of one country, albeit possibly moving within it from one context to another. These movements are at times transient in nature, creating temporary conditions, fluid by definition, in which one finds the dual functions of participation in the immediate structure and preparation for future associations. Schools are examples of such settings within which there is a definite and stated objective of preparation, as well as a culture and requirements pertaining during the period of participation. Prisons are yet another example. Other movements assume more permanent characteristics and include job changes, moving from one location to another, etc. In terms of definition there are, then, two distinct types. One defines the parameters for participation in the specific context and is intended to be a continuous definition, the other has the dual function of identifying skills and knowledge requisite for membership in the temporary entity and of setting the objectives which make the transition into a more permanent context viable. A third grader is required to read at a third grade level in order to function well in class; but overall that level of attainment is viewed only as a way station on route to a twelfth grade standard which opens doors to subsequent participation in the labor force or in tertiary level education institutions. The latter, in turn, also develop similar dualities of definition.

Garth Mangum has attempted to look at one state - Utah - as an example of a context which has a clear identity, within but distinct from the nation as a whole (1984). With seventy percent of its population belonging to the Church of Latter Day Saints which mandates the obtaining of an education as a religious obligation, it comes as no surprise that Utah enjoys the highest level of school attainment in the country (eighty percent versus a national average of sixty-six percent). It can be assumed that the high premium placed on education carried over to the marketplace in the establishment of criteria for employment. Among those lacking in the requisite skills, members of Utah's minority groups (Black, Hispanic, and Native American) and recently arrived immigrants are disproportionately represented, as evidence by the fact that their members constituted thirty-two

percent of enrollment in compensatory adult education programs, although they formed only five percent of the population (1982-1983). While it is not abundantly clear that the lack of literacy skills is necessarily an impediment for job performance one cannot overemphasize their significance enough in a state with such a highly developed ethos of education. Presumably, then, those lacking in skills live on the margins of society. If one further assumes that the unlettered in Utah are not members of the predominant church and participant in its culture, their marginality in that context is further confirmed. Can literacy instruction alone correct this situaiton? Probably not, but it might contribute to a narrowing of the gap. Is the need a real one? Possibly, but in light of the cultural and social importance attached to education, functionality in the more conventional sense most likely gives way to a definition derived from and relating to a socio-cultural, religious context, equal if not more powerful in establishing threshold notions and standards.

Lack of education and regular work, coupled with minority group membership is often associated with degeneration into criminal activity and subsequent incarceration. These attributes are simply borne out when one analyzes the characteristics of the nearly seven hundred thousand inmates of America's prisons (Gold, 1984). Within the prison population all of these characteristics are overrepresented. To the extent possible, prisons seek to correct some of these inadequacies as part of rehabilitation efforts aimed at facilitating transition into active participation in civilian life following termination of sentences. Since lack of schooling and functional illiteracy are almost endemic, corrective measures are often aimed, among other things, at the improvement of general education standards and reading deficiencies. In this regard, for example, Supreme Court Chief Justice Warren Burger has stated that "no prisoner should be released without being able to read, write, and do basic arithmetic" (Gold, 1984, p. 10). While rehabilitation efforts have, in general, had a checkered history, they have recently been imbued with renewed incentive, emanating in large part from the increased costs of maintaining prisoners and high rates of recidivism.

Prisons as a context and literacy training within their confines form an interesting, out-of-the-ordinary case of contextual definition and instruction. Literacy skills are not, in the main, necessary for leading one's prison life. Literate or not, prisons will continue to house their inmates until the completion of their sentenced terms. Rather, literacy is viewed as a skill required for transition into post-imprisionment contexts of a nature usually unknown at the time of instruction, and consequently derives its definition from more generalized, not situation bound notions of functional literacy levels. This approach is manifest in much of the actual instruction. Gold states that: "Much of the teaching focuses on the practice of isolated skills with little attention to transfer. This is exacerbated by the fact that there is little collaboration with vocational training and work programs....Success in literacy programs is not transfer-

red to other daily activities" (p. 14). In effect, then, even though it may be possible to integrate literacy into some aspects of prison life, this appears not to be done, such that the general attitude remains one of skill development for somewhat hazy, post prison careers.

Another point regarding literacy development in prison contexts emanates from the fact that the target group is a captive one, in every sense of the word. Literacy instruction in varieties of settings might well constitute a welcome diversion for inmates who are seeking ways of passing time. To some extent the forum within which literacy skills are taught might be more a part of the context than the substance being transmitted. This, of course, assumes that mere participation offers a benefit such, for example, as release from other activities, or the possibility of attending an activity outside of the prison walls, or its constituting a welcome diversion. Prison contexts are perhaps best characterized as situations in which there may be found a high proportion of functionally illiterate people, within which literacy abilities are not necessarily required, but in which the promise of brighter futures dictates the undertaking of instruction as a means towards rehabilitation.

Another context whose primary objective is the preparation of its participants for post-contextual careers is the community college. As institutions of tertiary education accepting for studies "any high school graduate or any adult who can profit from instruction" (Roueche, 1984, p.1), they have been the recipient of large numbers of functionally illiterate secondary school graduates and have discovered, more than any other framework, the significant gaps in attainment. Being, above all, instructional establishments, basic skills are essential requirements for performance within their contexts, or so one would assume. Consequently, remediation of lacunae in basic skills rapidly became a central community college priority. Surveying this situation in 1968 John Roueche found that "the most offered courses in American community colleges were remedial reading, remedial writing, and remedial arithmetic. As many as fifty percent of any entering freshman class were found in need of essential remedial work". He unfortunately further found that "few students who were initially placed in a remedial course ever completed class requirements. As many as ninety percent of all remedial students failed or withdrew....The courses were being offered...but the results were disastrous". This sorry record carries clear implications for the conduct of functional literacy and basic skill programs, assuming that the need for these competencies in a higher education context does not diminish. However, over a decade later two independent investigations both identified the following situation (Rouche, 1984, p.3):

> ...students would be expected to read, write, and figure more in remedial courses than would ever be required of them again in regular community college courses...the two studies documented that

> students in American community colleges are rarely expected to demonstrate literacy skills that are normally associated with college level courses and programs. (This latter finding has been reconfirmed as lately as 1982 by Richardson and Martens.)

Roueche summarizes the situation pertaining in the community college context thus (ibid., pp. 3-4):

> Putting it bluntly, reading and writing assignments of any consequence or depth were rarely made in regular courses. Many of the students...never purchased the required textbook or lab manual for a particular course or program because they had correctly discovered that reading and comprehending those materials were not necessary for successful course completion....Many instructors never mentioned the textbook name, much less made reading assignments in the text.

These findings and the devastating picture they paint serve to introduce some significant issues into the functional literacy dilemma. They indicate quite clearly that defined standards of desired literacy are not necessarily identical with actually required levels, even wtihin a context as heavily based upon reading as a community college. Indeed, it would appear that community colleges have tended to deal with functional illiteracy by reducing the amount of reading required for course work rather than by effectively inculcating the desired levels. While there are, to be sure, important exceptions to this, the trend observed is a significant one, suggesting a downgrading of course work on the one hand and a perpetuation of functional illiteracy on the other. Yet another, potentially more cogent point also arises: if it is possible to dispense with or overlook reading competencies in a context which is so reading dependent, there may be similar implications in other contexts where literacy is deemed to be important but is not nearly as central. Stated differently, the community college situation suggests strongly that the improvement of basic skills constitutes only one avenue for correcting literacy deficiencies; other mechanisms include the reduction of reading requirements within the context. Whether or not the latter approach has deleterious effects on quality remains a separate, as yet unanswerable issue. Research into this question is clearly necessary in order to make possible a thorough assessment of the actual, rather than the merely desired functional literacy levels to which various contexts should aspire.

Another of Rouche's observations is relevant in this regard. He reports that "students in courses with content of more perceived value, use, interest, and relevance to their personal

learning goals (e.g. specific function courses) were more likely to go beyond the minimum explicitly stated literacy demands....In courses transmitting more general information and of little perceived value or relationship to other course work (e.g., general education courses) students were inclined to accomplish only minimum requirements and, on average, do them poorly" (p. 4). One possible conclusion from this finding is that functional literacy increased when applied to a functional situation and does not develop when its context is viewed by individuals as being non-relevant. This would lend greater weight to the definition of functional literacy suggested earlier, in which emphasis was placed on "self-determined objectives" rather than on efforts to impose definitions externally. There is, however, also another possibility that the courses identified as having "more perceived value" relied less on reading, engaging students through other mechanisms, while the courses of "little perceived value " were more etheral and heavily based on the reading of a textbook. Further investigation is clearly called for on this issue.

The community college context is one with a present - albeit problematic - demand for literacy, as well as a framework for preparing individuals for futures in which basic skill competencies are assumed. Its future orientation is, perhaps, even more complex than its present requirements. If the demands for participation, which are quite concretized, are being so poorly met, surely the stipulated standards for somewhat amorphous future careers become increasingly abstract and obscured, potentially resulting in reduced motivation for compliance. Indeed, it is entirely possible that in the perception of participants present and future are substantively unrelated; that during the course of participation students are primarily concerned with the acquisition of those competencies necessary for program completion and not at all part of any official curriculum. In a study undertaken among students in a major American university, for example, it was found that many of the skills learned did not relate to formal subject matter, but rather to those behaviors most likely to be rewarded (e.g., verbalization, succeeding in examination through means not always strictly legal, etc.) and to assure graduation (Snyder, 1970). Similarly, it might be suggested that competencies required for job performance are typically gained on-the-job and not so much in preparing for it. A degree itself, more than the knowledge and abilities that its possession implies may well be, in participant perceptions, the central object of their attention, creating in effect, a cleavage between the preparatory and subsequent work experience phases. This leaves in question the extent to which community college contexts are, in fact, providing an education the substance of which has future application as well as the extent to which employees can rely upon the existence of particular sets of skills and knowledge. Because of its structure and experience, the American community college offers those concerned with these issues an excellent opportunity for further examination and clarification.

A variety of contexts and literacy within their confines have been discussed. Obviously, these are but a very small sample of the totality of groups and contextual situations that exist around the country. Each has its unique attributes which dictate both differential definitions and conditions regarding literacy. However, it should be noted that all these groups and contexts exist and function within a larger, macro or national context to which they must relate. Thus, while retaining group or context specific characteristics, there will always be a shared domain, common across groups. To some extent the University of Texas' Adult Functional Competency study (1975) sought to identify that domain in an effort to define common functional literacy minima. In doing so the researchers assembled a collection of written materials which, in their opinion, constituted a basis for definition of a desired common domain. Just how valid such a procedure is remains subject to debate as the materials selected for inclusion were chosen on the basis of judgements, rather than on the basis of investigating the reading that people actually engage in. Beginning the search for a common definition, it is suggested, might more profitably survey actual rather than desired reading behaviors. In the same vein, group or context specific determinations should also originate in the investigation of actual reading habits and behaviors. If it is found that these fall short of desired standards and require upgrading, it is most likely not reading itself that must be improved, but those attributes of the context which mandate and sustain the lower level.

The argument being put forth is that reading, being context linked and dependent, does not lend itself to change and upgrading independently of the context itself. As the context evolves, demanding more of its members, the chances that levels will improved heightens. This proposition is of importance in the design of intervention strategies aimed at correcting functional illiteracy conditions. It asserts that programs need be aimed at the contextual conditions and not just at their reading components. It also suggests that actual literacy levels will usually not rise above the contextually imposed expectations such that efforts to raise them acontextually are unlikely to be effective. One clear implication for the field of adult literacy education is the need to engage in careful examination of the groups and contexts within which programs are to be conducted as a basis for both definition of functional literacy and the determination of the instructional mission. In this light, it is possible to move on to a discussion of various efforts to correct functional illiteracy and develop reading competencies among diverse groups of people.

IV. Improving Literacy Proficiency: Some Programs and Approaches

Efforts to eradicate functional illiteracy have been undertaken in numerous forms and frameworks since the turn of the century. Literacy classes, under one label or another, were initiated soon after the problem was identified and the premise accepted that all citizens of the United States should be able to read and write. The programs made available have two distinct attributes to which much attention has been paid. The first is organizational in nature and deals with form and structure; i.e., the establishment and provision of frameworks within which instruction can take place. The second is substantive, concerned with a combination of the content and instructional approaches of these educational activities.

In discussing organizational aspects of adult literacy programs it is of importance to first review their status relative to the larger system of education. Schools have developed in Western societies as the primary vehicle for the provision of education to the public; an education which is viewed in terms of its preparatory function. George Washington, in his Farewell Address of 1796, stated their significance and mission thus: "Promote, then, as an object of primary importance, institutions for the general diffusion of knowledge. In proportion as the structure of a government gives force to public opinion it is essential that public opinion be enlightened." What precisely such enlightenment might consist of was often subject to debate, but there has throughout the history of the United States been virtual consensus that schools are the predominant means of its spread, and that children and youth constitute their natural population. To be sure, adult education has not been absent from American educational thought and practice, although it has typically been relegated to a marginal position and viewed as being complementary to that which is attained through formal schooling. Indeed, at times adult education has been pursued because it was felt that it could enhance school performance. Thus, for example, Josiah Holbrook suggested that one purpose of the adult lyceums that he proposed (1829) was: "Raising the qualifications of this responsible and important class of the community" - teachers - who "are engaged in forming the character of the rising generation and molding the destiny of our nation" (1959, p. 32). Overwhelmingly, educational energies have been devoted to the construction, development, and enhancement of primary, secondary, and tertiary institutions, not to building frameworks for adult education outside the normative school system. The types of program which are necessary for dealing with adult functional illiteracy fall, then, within the least developed realm of educational practice. Practically, this situation is manifest in restricted and restrictive budgets, lack of adequate infrastructure, an insufficient properly trained and organized instructional corps, a deep chasm in academic attention both in instruction and research, and in a lamentable lack of professionalism. Despite numerous starts and a wide range of activity, the field of adult education is in many ways still in an embryonic stage.

This is, unfortunately, as true of that aspect of adult education which relates to functional illiterates as it is of the field at large.

Bearing these caveats in mind, and against their backdrop, attention can be turned to an examination of programs and activities that do exist. Organizationally, two approaches have dominated the practice of adult literacy education. The first derives from the notion that illiteracy among adults is a social blight resulting from one or another malfunction of the formal school system (faulty outreach such that not all people attended schools, improper instruction, or faulty learning) which can and should be eradicated as soon as possible. It has led "to the initiation of 'one-shot wars' in which large numbers of students, workers, and teachers have set out to 'eradicate illiteracy' only to discover that each new generation that fails to develop literacy leads to a new 'crop' of illiterates. Nowhere has this fallacy....been more evident than in those mass literacy campaigns....in which no provisions were made to develop the national, political, governmental, and educational organizational structures needed to make possible the continuous development of literacy in both childhood and adulthood" (Sticht, 1984, p. 3). Although the adult literacy campaign approach has been more prevalent in third world countries, it has not eluded some American conceptions of the issue.

The second approach is more expansive, emanating from the notion that illiteracy is but one, albeit very cogent manifestation of basic skill insufficiencies, therefore requiring that its rectification be anchored in a broadly conceived basic skills educational program. Such activities usually incorporate instruction in reading, writing, and arithmetic, often paralleling primary school curricula. By far the most extensive adult literacy effort in the country - the Adult Basic Education (ABE) program - is construed in this vein. Other attributes of this basic skills approach generally include lengthier duration of instruction, and termination through certification procedures which make it possible for individuals to continue their education into a secondary equivalency cycle (ASE) and beyond. Inherent in this approach is the premise that illiteracy, as a manifestation of a lack of more general education, should be coupled with that education in a "second change" type of activity. Specifically, the Adult Education Act, Public Law 91-230, under whose authority ABE programs are carried out, states their objectives thus:

> (1) Enable all adults to acquire basic skills necessary to function in society;
> (2) Enable adults who so desire to continue their education to at least the level of completion of secondary school, and
> (3) Make available to adults the means to secure training that will enable them to become more employable, productive, and responsible citizens. (Sec. 302, amended, 1978)

The programs could, then, be terminal in nature, preparatory to continuing a secondary cycle, or preparatory to embarking upon other, usually work related, training activities.

Under its aegis, ABE consists of three separate activities which, together, have an enrollment of approximately 2.2 million people over the age of sixteen. The components are basic education, secondary education, and the teaching of English as a second language, with each being delivered through a variety of organizational mechanisms including both primary and secondary schools, community colleges, specialized adult learning centers, community centers, homes, etc. It has been found that one third of participants had previously completed between seven and nine years of schooling, while an additional third had been in schools between ten and twelve grades, with the remainder enrolling in ESL classes (Delker, 1984, pp. 1-8). It would appear, then, that even those enrolling in the most basic level had, in the past, had relatively long school careers during which, for one reason or another they had not been successful in learning basic skills. In this regard the age distribution of participants is also of interest: the overwhelming majority of participants are under the age of thirty-four (69% in ABE; 81% in ASE; 68% in ESL), indicating that the program caters to young adults whose school experience was in the more recent past, rather than older individuals who had not been to school at all. Clearly, this fact underscores the severity of the functional illiteracy issue, challenging the notion that its target population consists of a residue of an era during which school coverage was incomplete. It also serves as yet additional evidence that America's functionally illiterate population is largely comprised of those who had at least completed the primary school cycle, and often attended schools longer than that.

Another observation suggests itself from these data. The relatively young age composition of ABE and ASE students lends credence to the notion that functional applications of basic skills - or basic credentials - serve as a central motivating factor in the determination of participation patterns. Significantly, nearly half (46.2%) of enrollees sought secondary school credentials (the GED certificate), while only a third stated the acquisition of basic competencies was their main objective. The reminder were ESL students (Delker, 1984, pp. 20-21). Labor market realities may well have more to do with participation than a delayed thirst for knowledge. Interestingly, however, when queried regarding actual gains achieved through participation most of those asked responded in terms of self-actualization and specific skills learned, suggested that for those completing the courses accent shifts from the initial motivating factors. The material itself, it seems, has a power of its own.

Much of the criticism of adult literacy and basic education has focused on what is felt to be its tendency to parallel, if not actually repeat, traditional primary and secondary school curricula. Two aspects of this are found to be disturbing. On the one hand adult functional illiterates are, it is argued,

equated with school age children and often presented with courses of study wholly unsuitable for adults, either in terms of their interests or concerns. Such curricula, it is submitted, are non-relevant to the needs of adults as they are essentially designed for different purposes. On the other hand, in adopting school derived curricula for adult programs there is an implied assumption that, due to lack of schooling, adult illiterates are developmentally no further advanced than school children, with the result that they are often treated as such (Harman, 1974). Recognizing these issues, the U.S. Office of Education provided funding for the development of what might be considered an "adult curriculum". Completed in 1976, the Adult Performance Level study proposed a list of sixty-five substantive topics which had been identified as being of concern, interest, and relevance to adults as the basis for future program curricula. These are gradually being adopted and are supplanting many of the more conventional, school curriculum based efforts (Delker, 1984, p. 2). A further recommendation emanating from the criticism of earlier programs sought to create a diversity of instructional approaches and to offer programs in a variety of diverse forms and settings. Foremost among these, recent information reveals, is individualized instruction which either on its own or coupled with group instruction now typifies most programs (Delker, 1984, p. 9).

Although adult education activities are federally mandated through the Adult Education Act, their establishment, design, and operation is relegated to the states, each of which works through various local groups, agencies and institutions (Magnum, 1984; Harris 1984). As a result there is a great deal of variability among programs, both between and within states. In most, but not all program areas, federal funds are added to by state, local, and private resources such that the actual expenditure on basic education programs far exceeds the federal allocation. As might be expected however, funding never seems to be adequate. Indeed, Mangum reports that in Utah not all those wishing to enroll in some of the programs could be accomodated; a situation that pertains elsewhere as well.

Uncertain finances, coupled with the notion that adult literacy efforts are temporary in nature and will cease altogether when the "problem" has been "solved", have combined to mitigate against the formation of adequate cadres of professionally trained instructors. Indeed, most training of personnel for programs is of extremely short duration, largely offered by agencies providing programs, and often not required of all instructors, such that many of those teaching have had no training at all. Teacher training institutions and schools of education, in the main, have not included programs for training teachers of adult illiterates in their curricula and courses of study. This situation has had several consequences, affecting both organizational and instructional aspects of programs.

Organizationally, adult literacy programs have recruited a very varied teaching staff with teachers having a range of backgrounds typically excluding specific training in adult education. Three quarters of ABE instructors and closer to eighty percent of ASE teachers have not been certified in adult education. This situation is somewhat better among ESL teachers, nearly half of whom have had relevant professional training and attained certification (Delker, 1984, p. 17). Yet another consequence is the fact that the overwhelming majority of teachers (83%) are only employed on a part time basis. Perhaps the most significant and, in terms of educational systems in general, distinctive feature pertaining to instructional personnel in adult programs has been the widespread utilization of volunteers. Whether serving as teachers, tutors, or aides, volunteers constitute a very important factor in programs (Delker, 1984; Waite, 1984). Typically, those volunteering are provided with brief programs of orientation and training and then either work independently or in conjunction with paid instructors. Among volunteers one finds a plethora of backgrounds, professions, and skills. Clearly, the combination of part-time instructors and volunteers, the majority of whom are not professionally trained in either adult education or the teaching of basic skills to the functionally illiterate, determines much of the organizational and administrative character of programs. It might, for example, explain the heavy emphasis on individualized instruction.

Two further observations emanating from this situation are of a more critical nature. The part-timeness, lack of professionalism, and reliance upon volunteers that characterize much of adult basic education activity indicates that the campaign or "quick-fix" attitude towards adult literacy education remains very strong. Despite the fact that many agree that, educationally, the task of adult education should be carried out through programs and courses of lengthier duration, replete with well conceived, broad curricula, an atmosphere of impermanence and campaign like approach persist and typify the field. Moreover, this temporariness and general hue tend to mitigate against the development of the field itself. The lack of attention paid to adult literacy programs by the various educational disciplines, the lack of professionalism of teachers - other, of course, than experientially gained knowledge - together with the lamentable state of research in the field do not auger well for its substantive development and obviously has a deleterious effect on programs. One should hasten to qualify this statement by indicating that there are examples of excellent programs which achieve admirable results but, unfortunately, they are the exception rather than the rule.

Adult literacy programs are highly decentralized as a rule. Much of the activity is organized at local and community levels, with State and Federal involvement being largely financial and at times supervisory. Community based programming consists of several components, foremost amongst which is a notion of organization. Within the context of literacy education the term largely

refers to "groups or organizations which have evolved through the efforts of members of a community in response to their community's need" (Eggert, 1984, p. 2), emphasizing the organizational aspect. Volunteer organizations (particularly the two most concerned with adult literacy: Laubach Literacy Action and Literacy Volunteers of America) strongly advocate the establishment of localized groups of volunteers, structurally and operationally functioning as community action bodies (Waite, 1984; Eggert, 1984; Harris, 1984). Such community groups are charged with the recruitment of both students and instructors (paid, volunteer, or both depending on the nature of the community groups), raising funds from all available sources, organizing and administering programs, as well as dealing with substantive issues concerning the instruction itself. Once again, this mechanism for the delivery of adult literacy education bears connotations of tentativeness and the rapid "one-shot battle" against illiteracy. Some of the rhetoric is quite explicit in both advocating the use of volunteers and defining their mission in campaign terminology. Thus, for example, Peter Waite states that: "The battle with illiteracy can be won, but the use of volunteers in this fight must become a national priority", and further that "Community based coordinated programs which utilize massive numbers of volunteers can and will begin to solve the problem of illiteracy in the United States" (1984, pp. 8-9).

Notions of voluntarism and community based educational activities are closely linked, and to no small extent each is believed to be contingent on the other. The use of volunteers is characteristic of literacy programs throughout the world and, indeed, is perhaps one of the central manifestations of the campaign approach. It is also an organizational strategy made necessary by the combination of restricted budgets and the general lack of available qualified personnel. Volunteers are either mobilized on a nationwide basis and sent by a central campaign headquarters to teach wherever they are needed (e.g., in the campaigns mounted in Cuba, Iran, the Soviet Union), or more quietly gather within a community to deal with local issues (e.g., Great Britain, Isreal, the United States). This latter has come to be known as the community based approach. While the evaluation research regarding programs organized in this fashion is slim, there are accounts of highly effective efforts in which the relationships developed between students and their volunteer tutors have resulted in important learning gains (e.g., Project F.I.S.T. in New Jersey; Stauffer, 1973). Although currently available data does not allow for the drawing of definitive conclusions, logic would indicate that the combined use of professional instructors and volunteers might be a potentially beneficial approach as it would bring together the necessary know-how and familiarity with adult education techniques and the dedication of the volunteer to a program's objectives and participants. This, however, should occur within programs conceived as more systematic and broad; not in fights, battles, campaigns, or wars, but in carefully plotted educational endeavors.

Another aspect of the community approach which has often been suggested as essential in adult literacy work (Hunter and Harman, 1979), is substantive rather than organizational. Situation specificity has been emphasized as a quintessential educational approach in literacy programs and entails custom tailoring activities to conditions prevailing in diverse contextual conditions; conditions more likely to find expression within communities in which people requiring instruction congregate and live. Rather than be detached, tend to uniformity, and seek universality, curricula developed within community contexts, relating to them, and designed for known participants are more likely to be appreciated and effective. Some concrete evidence - albeit scarce - exists indicating that drop-out rates, rates of learning, and retention in programs so conceived surpassed that acheieved through more conventional approaches (Harman, 1977). It is more than likely that many of the actual courses of instruction that grow through tutor-tutee relationships assume the attributes of situation specificity and contextual relevance resulting in positive learning experiences. Unfortunately, such individual experiences are rarly documented, making them unavailable for analyses and the drawing of conclusions.

Just how effective programs heavily based on volunteer services are remains unclear. Indeed, even if data were available, the very nature of such activities and their emphasis on individual instruction would render finding ungeneralizable. Somewhat more attention has been devoted to the assessment of ABE and ASE programs, mostly conducted locally with both State and Federal subsidy. A number of studies undertaken over the past decade have been fairly consistent in the findings reported (Darkenwald and Valentine, 1984). Drop-out rates continue to be extraordinarily high, similar to such rates reported from programs around the world (Harman, 1974) - above fifty percent. Darkenwald and Valentine, in the most recently conducted evaluative study, have identified a phenomenon which warrents further investigation in this regard: over a third of the drop-outs they found in the programs they were examining left either because of transfer to other educational activities, or because they had successfully completed final examinations (GED) but failed to report this to their classroom instructors, thus reducing the actual drop-out rate substantially (1984, pp. 71-72). Of those completing programs, the majority are usually satisfied with the gains made and feel that their newly acquired skills will be of importance in both improving their employment status and their personal lives. Unfortunately, longtudinal evluations seeking to learn how well newly learned skills are retained over time are only few and far between. The few that have been conducted, usually in other countries, repeatedly show skill loss, so much so that some have reported near total return to states of illiteracy, presumably due to lack of application of the skills (Harman, 1974). Above all, it should be borne in mind that evaluation studies relate only to those who either have or currently attend programs, while the overwhelming majority of functionally illiterate adults do not participate in such activities. Why they do not, whether or not they would if programs were made available that would suit their

needs, whether different types of program might have greater impact and attain wider coverage all remian issues subject to conjecture and speculation. Our knowledge regarding the majority of the population we seek to serve in these respects simply remains too scant.

In instructional activities in which the utility of participation is clearer or the extent of control over participants is greater, both coverage and results are generally far better. This would hold true of programs conducted by the military (Duffy, 1984) and the teaching of English as a second language. In both instances attendance and effect are better, implying perhaps, that the immediate relevance of the activity is more greatly appreciated by participants and, in the case of the military, that the ability to virtually mandate participation has positive results, at least insofar as skill attainment is concerned.

Jeanne Chall has suggested a number of premises regarding the overall poor state of adult literacy education. First, she reiterates "the long acknowledged problems of reaching those in need, and maintaining their regular attendance and consistent interest", an issue amply emphasized above. Additionally, she underscores "the tendency to underplay development and progression in the curriculum and in the achievement of students...no doubt related to the underplaying of assessment and evaluation". This, she offers, "stems...from a lack of clarity as to what should be taught, when, to what students" (1984, pp. 2-3). Add to these observations the unfortunate fact that the field of adult literacy education appears to be at a virtual standstill insofar as systematic research and development are concerned, creating a situation whereby from year to year the issues are restated without benefit of new insights into their solution - and the essential lacunae of this area of educational concern are forcefully laid bare.

One perplexing issue, far from resolution, relates to the differences between adult learning of reading skills and learning as it is known to occur among children. Quite obviously this is a critical issue for those engaged in the instruction of adults as, from its answers would flow the necessary curricula. Here too, the paucity of research makes it impossible to state any definitive conclusions. The essential issue can be stated thus: are adult illiterates, from the point of view of the patterns which dictate their acquisiton of reading skills at both basic and more advanced levels similar to children several decades younger or do they require different instructional approaches and curricula. The debate around this issue cannot, unfortuntely, draw in any significant way, upon findings from appropriate research, but rather must now, as in the past, be fed by speculation, suggestion, and inferences based on rather narrow agglomerations of documented experience.

Chall has elaborated a five staged notion of reading development which advances from very rudimentary reading ability usually associated with beginnings of the learning process at the first grade level, to a high level necessary to read sophisticated materials at a twelfth grade standard. Each stage requires a vocabulary and general level of knowledge more complex than that preceding it, makes use of longer sentences, and is more abstract. "Reading at successive levels of proficiency depends on ever more difficult and varied language, more complex ideas, and more advanced reading skills" Chall writes, suggesting that systematic and sequenced progression from one stage to the next characterizes the development of reading (1983; 1984). She further argues that "The course of development in reading is essentially the same for adults and children, although perhaps there is a need for a somewhat different emphasis depending upon maturity, and different text context" (1984, p. 10). Insofar as learning is concerned, "it takes the typical student sixteen years or more to progress from Stage one through five. Does it take as long for adults? There is little evidence on this question" (ibid, p. 12).

Most instructional strategies being utilized in adult literacy programs would accept the basic notion that reading development is an incremental process, requiring that teaching begin with Chall's first stage, although they might quibble with the stipulation that sixteen or more years are necessary for the attainment of the final phase. Indeed, despair and chaos would set in if the latter was a hard, non-assailable finding. Adult education in general and adult literacy programs in particular are inherently based on short term, time limited objectives which would exclude even the barest notion that their's is a multi-year task. Even if one assumes that the progression of adults through the various states could be compressed - a possibility Jeanne Chall raises, but essentially rejects - the amount of time necessary would be far too lengthy to contemplate.

Developmental time, however, is only one attribute of the stage development theory of reading. Elaborated with children rather than adults in mind, progression is closely linked with other aspects of growth, both cognitive and affective. The development of abstract thought, of larger and more complex vocabularies, of broader ranges of interest, all occur in parallel with the reading ability developments described. In many of these regards adults are dissimilar from children. Although presumably in a state of constant flux, adult interests and concerns differ from those of children, as do their vocabularies and cognitive abilities. Moreover, for the most part, their life styles and aspirations are anchored in reality and familiarity with their environments, much more so than would be the case with their young and adolescent children. Surely, these characteristics, typical - in general - of adults and less common in children, have significant ramifications for adult learning. "In most instances in which adults purposefully engage in systematic and sustained learning activities", states Knox, "their intent is

to modify performance. Their reasons for engaging in the learning activity and their anticipated uses of the new learnings typically relate to a coherent area of activity and performance" (1977, p. 406). Further, "because adults typically want to use what they learn soon after they learn it, it is usually easy to establish the connection between specific learning activities and the area of performance to which the new knowledge is applied" (ibid, p. 408).

Unvalidated by data from empirical investigations as they are, it is nonetheless possible to formulate some assumptions regarding manifestations of adult learning characteristics insofar as the acquisition of reading is concerned. First, it is unlikely that an adult will engage in a learning venture of overly lengthy duration; certainly not the full span of years that Chall indicates are necessary for the attainment of Stage five. Second, as the substance of instruction must reflect its utility, it is unlikely that adults would respond well to either meaningless texts, or texts that do not relate to their areas of interest and concern. Moreover, the notion that more relevant texts might be achieved only following a laborious developmental process is not likely to elicit much enthusaism or willingness to sustain course participation. It is, in fact, quite possible that at least some of the drop-out phenomenon could be explained as occuring when participants discover a dissonance between their specific learning objectives and the combination of substance and pace that are characteristic of most programs of adult reading instruction. Some evidence in this regard has been found in the UNESCO sponsored work-oriented literacy project conducted several years ago in Iran (Bazany, 1973). Third, the adult's vocabulary and life experiences are unlikely to grow far beyond the extent to which they have become established in adulthood, largely because these are determined by context and culture. The combination of verbal ability and contextual factors no doubt also dictate the extent to which it is possible to further develop reading abilities. Vocabulary, for example, is critical if one is to advance literacy skills such that in the absence of more developed language abilities a certain limitation is a priority placed on reading potential. Attaining a twelfth grade reading level requires "extensive general and specialized vocabularies, considerable background knowledge, ability to reason, and to think critically" (Chall, 1984, p. 21). The adult who has difficulty with more sophisticated vocabulary, limited general knowledge, and whose thought processes are circumscribed by context, condition, and experience may be unable to attain the more advanced reading stages. Alternatively, such situations imply that literacy training must be conceived in very broad terms indeed, placing emphasis on the development of those skills, abilities, and concepts which are prerequisite for furthering literacy achievements.

Adult learning experiences, in literacy as in other realms, need to be organized in discrete and distinct units, always relating to more or less immediate concerns, perception, and

motivations of learners. Such organization could result in positive acquisition, hold the attention of learners and, over time through a cummulative process, lead to the development of higher order abilities in reading, if at the same time contextual conditions have also evolved, creating fertile soil for further growth. Adult learning audiences are not captive in programs as children are in schools, placing an added onus on programs to meet the requirements and expectations of participants. While our aspirations should always be the improvement of broadly defined literacies, realism should direct the manner and method employed in their attainment.

One approach that is being increasingly experimented with, in consequence, places early emphasis on the instruction of substance, the elements of which bear direct association with areas and topics of immediate concern and relevance to learners. Reading instruction is relegated to an ostensibly secondary position, directly engaged in as an apparent appendage to the actual content. When reading instruction takes place, it follows fairly standard approaches, dwelling appropriately on sound-letter associations, word recognition, and decoding. All of this, however, takes place within a learning activity in which the central emphasis is placed upon content and in which it is precisely the content that holds the attention of learners. As yet in relatively early experimental stages, this approach has by now been effected in countries as disparate as Brazil, Thailand, and the United States, in each case showing promising results (Harman, 1977). An important lesson that has been learned from these various experiences is that the instruction of literacy to adults must be cast in adult-appropriate forms and conveyed through similarly appropriate contents, even though the actual reading development components of programs follow more classical methodologies. Clearly, however, a great deal of additional experimentation and validation are essential.

The teaching of English as a second language constitutes a special case of instruction requiring unique instruction and organizational approaches. Unlike literacy programs for native speakers of English, ESL efforts must contend with the added issues of acculturation and language instruction, both as prerequisites to the teaching of reading. From an instructional point of view this triple agenda presents educators with different sets of issues, albeit the need to be consistent in relating programs to known contextual conditions has been recognized as being essential here as well (Wallerstein, 1984; Longfield, 1984). For the new immigrant knowledge of the new culture, entailing knowledge of the new language are critical instrumentalities in the process of absorption. Whether or not literacy abilities are viewed in the same light is a function largely of the background experiences of individuals within their own cultures and contexts of origin. Many of the different instructional approaches developed for use in ESL programs take cognizance of this (Savage, 1984), and seem to have abandoned the notion that reading elements in ESL activities can conform to

more conventional methodologies which assume prior knowledge of the language and basic conscientization towards reading. Ultimately, it would appear that effective English language development is contingent upon a variety of factors of which ESL programs are only one. Others would include absorption into the labor market in situations in which English is the main mode of communication, participation in at least some aspects of general social life (including television viewing), and the participation of children in regular schools and their language development. Surrounded by so many change agents at once, under overall conditions of flux and change, the likelihood that English, at least at rudimentary levels, will be learned heightens. Whether or not reading abilities are similarly influenced is more a function of specific circumstances, and might be different for different individuals.

As is the case in adult literacy education in general, ESL is also thought to be a transient educational activity, although it has benefitted from more systematic investigation. While it is certainly the case that within specific families the issue is a temporary one as second and third generations will have greater proficiency than the first, one must bear in mind the fact that each year new arrivals come to the shores of the United States, requiring the same type of assistance that past immigrants have received. Indeed, the teaching of English to new immigrants and their introduction to American life and more is an educational endeavor with over a century long history, and will remain an active educational domain as long as immigrants continue arriving.

For the learner of English as a second language there are two contents, one implicit, the other explicit. These are the language and the new culture it represents. Reading is almost definitionally relegated the function of being a vehicle for the learning of these contents. A parallel situation in regular adult literacy instruction would also be the placing of emphasis on diverse literacies - as opposed to literacy in the more conventional sense of reading ability - and thereby placing the central emphasis of the learning experiences on carefully charted extrapolations of the term "functional", rather than on the narrow skill of reading. In this regard, and in this fashion functional literacy education becomes a much broader concept of adult education, aimed at the general growth and development of learners, not just their reading abilities. The latter, it is contended, will develop almost as a by-product; as individuals gain in confidence, are successful in altering their circumstances and contexts and feel that they are in greater control of events rather than being directed by them.

Adult literacy education so conceived is a central tool of adult development, a vehicle for important individual and social growth. As such it could become a permanent educational activity which would provide substance to notions of lifelong learning and above all make it possible for individuals to continuously seek

the attainment of new goals and improved quality of life. Clearly, the indivduals involved stand to benefit from such education. Equally as clearly, the ultimate beneficiary is society as a whole.

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